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By-Babcock, Chester D.
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An appraisal of Washington's modern legislation indicates that the county as an educational intermediate unit needs to be reevaluated. It is suggested in this document that the service functions of the unit are of first importance in such a reevaluation. Fourteen service functions are suggested in pointing out that the function of the intermediate unit and its personnel is to provide leadership and consultant services to individual school districts in developing needed services and resources at the local level. (SW)

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THE INTERMEDIATE UNIT

by

Chester D. Babcock
Assistant State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Olympia, Washington

Each of us, I am sure, looks at legislation in terms of his own particular responsibilities and interests. And I confess that in considering the legislation dealing with the establishment of intermediate units, I have studied most carefully the implications for the instructional program. (You know, Scott Milligan and I have worked out a quite satisfactory arrangement--in private, each freely tells the other how to run his Division--but in public we stick to our own fields. And that will be my policy this afternoon--well, generally speaking!)

In considering the implications of the law, it is helpful to turn for a moment to history. In 1843, there were four county units in the entire Pacific Northwest: Champoege and Yamhill, Clackamas and Tualatin. Two years later, Lewis, Clatsop and Polk were organized. Today this same territory stretching from the Continental Divide to the Pacific embraces 36 counties in Oregon, 39 in Washington, and 44 in Idaho. From territorial days the county served as the intermediate unit between the state and local levels of government.

Modern political scientists refer to the county unit as a product of the "horse and buggy" era because county seats were generally established in that early day so that no citizen was more than a day's travel away. During the past two decades, people have been increasingly asking whether or not the

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county as a necessary unit of government is obsolete--a vestigial structure remaining from a period when communications were slow, when travel was limited, when the population was largely rural, when interests and concerns were provincial. A study of the functions assigned generally to county governments when our State constitution was drafted would indicate that there is some basis for these charges.

Today we find ourselves confronted with legislation the purpose of which in a sense is to redefine the role of this intermediate unit as it relates to the specific field of education. We are given the responsibility of redesigning the "service area," of redefining the "service role," and of re-evaluating the "service functions." And I would submit to you that if we are to think creatively and to fulfill our obligation, we must make every effort to put out of our thinking the concept of the "county" with its 1889 boundaries, in its traditional political context, and with its orientation toward a day long past. We have the opportunity to make history.

In considering the curricular and instructional implications of Chapter 139, Laws of 1965, I must make certain assumptions--assumptions which do not necessarily at this point represent State Office policy. May I emphasize this. They represent rather my own philosophical orientation as to the role of the intermediate unit. With some of these assumptions, I am sure you will not all agree. However, agree or disagree, I think it is imperative that they be given thoughtful consideration as we move forward together in implementing the legislation.

My first assumption is that the size of the service area, as well as its boundaries, must be determined in relation to geographic factors, and will be influenced but not necessarily limited by population distribution.

Abraham Lincoln once said that a man's legs should be long enough to reach from his body to the ground! And my second assumption is based upon the same kind of logic: The intermediate unit must be sufficiently large to justify, economically, the employment of the personnel needed to supply the essential services.

Third, it is not the primary role of intermediate unit personnel to provide direct services to children and youth.

Fourth, it is a secondary role of the intermediate unit to provide special services directly to children under contract with participating districts when districts because of size cannot efficiently and economically provide such needed service for themselves.

Fifth, it is not the role of the intermediate unit to provide services to school districts when those districts, individually or through cooperative arrangements, can efficiently and effectively provide the services for themselves.

Sixth, it is the function of intermediate unit personnel to provide leadership and consultant services to individual school districts in developing needed services and resources at the local level. While I have listed this last, I have done so only for emphasis, because I regard it as of first importance. It carries with it the implication of educational leadership.

If you will accept my six assumptions, then the service functions of the intermediate unit follow logically. And the outline of service functions suggests, perhaps, the criteria which might be employed by the State Board of Education in giving its approval to a proposed program. Let me suggest some fourteen points--service functions--which we might expect each intermediate unit to perform. In performing these functions, the unit would serve the local districts within

the service area, and, at the same time, serve as an arm of the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction:

1. Give leadership in the development and organization of inservice educational programs for teachers, administrators, and supervisory personnel. (New media, innovations, etc.)
2. Assist school districts in establishing valid and useful criteria to be employed in the selection of instructional material.
3. Provide, under contract and where needed, special services for exceptional children--handicapped, talented, etc.
4. Provide consultant services to local districts or combinations of districts in developing adequate pupil-personnel services--counseling and guidance, health, etc.
5. Provide consultant services to local districts when needed in developing projects and proposals under the various acts providing federal aid to education.
6. Give leadership in curriculum development and in the improvement of instructional practices at the local district level.
7. Provide local districts on a cooperative basis needed audio-visual instructional aids and materials.
8. Consult with local districts on statutory provisions, and rules and regulations of the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction which relate to administrative procedures and instructional program.
9. Give leadership to school districts in the development of sound educational specifications as the preliminary step in the planning

of new school facilities and to provide needed technical assistance in the development of plans and in the construction of the school plant.

10. Cooperate with teacher-education institutions and local school districts in strengthening the "September Experience," "Internship," and "Practice Teaching" programs.
11. Give leadership and assistance to local districts in the development of well-planned and well-developed library services and facilities.
12. Stimulate and initiate action research in the areas of curriculum, instruction, administration, and finance.
13. Serve as an administrative and service arm of the State Office--an adjunct to each of the divisions. This might include such functions as the preliminary approval or disapproval of programs under the requirements of the new distribution formula, fiscal accounting and reporting, coordination of data processing, assistance in program generation, budgeting, etc. etc.
14. Provide, in a consultant role, personnel as highly trained and as competent as the most highly trained and the most competent individuals working within the service area.

What I am saying in outlining these fourteen points is that my concept of the role and function of the intermediate unit goes far beyond the roles and functions traditionally associated with it. The fourteen points are only suggestive--they are not listed in any priority order. But if they were, I would place near the top those which involve leadership, stimulation, creativity, and resourcefulness. I think we downgrade the office when we let it become submerged in routines and details which might better be handled at

the district level or abandoned entirely. This is a time--and an opportunity--to take stock.

I have not discussed either personnel or organization of the intermediate unit. This is deliberate. Personnel requirements will vary in relation to the services to be rendered, the size of districts and the number of districts to be served, the geographic region to be included within the area to be served--even topography in our State can be a factor.

The same factors relate to the administrative organization within the intermediate unit office. However, I personally have the feeling that it would be a grave mistake were the intermediate unit to be so large that it would necessitate a central and several sub or regional offices. The danger here, I think, is that the net result might well be that we could end up with existing county offices becoming sub-offices and all we would achieve would be the erection of an intermediate superstructure--another layer in the administration hierarchy. This, of course, does not mean that intermediate unit service personnel must all be housed in the service center--many might be housed around the region, using the facilities of local districts.

The State Board of Education is given by the law the responsibility of establishing the criteria under which it will approve a "service area." It also bears the responsibility for determining the "minimum services" which must be rendered by a new intermediate unit. Upon State Board approval of both "service area" and "service function" depends the allocation of State funds.

As I see it, the State Board of Education has two courses of action open to it with reference to the service function: It may say that all service or program criteria must be met before approval will be granted.

Or it may grant approval on the basis of a soundly planned program which meets some of the criteria and shows promise of evolving into a broadly based and soundly administered complex of service functions (it would give some A's for effort!). As to the decision, I would not like to attempt to second guess the State Board; however, it must be remembered that the State Board may at any time, after a public hearing, modify either service areas or service functions.

At this point, I confess I fell optimistic as to the outcome of all our collective efforts to implement effectively the provisions of the new law. Among county boards, among county superintendents, within the Office of the State Superintendent, within the ranks of the State Board, we are going to encounter areas of disagreement. But the law itself contains a statement of purpose which provides the basic criterion to which none of us can take exception -- "to equalize the educational opportunities for all children within the State." This has been a basic concept since the Barefoot Schoolboy Law and John R. Rogers. I think there is not one among us unwilling to make the compromises necessary to make that statement of purpose a reality.